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SUBJECT: GOR PICKS AND CHOOSES ITS HUMAN RIGHTS FORA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell.  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The recent fact-finding trip by three noted human rights lawyers to Moscow was largely ignored by GOR officials, in keeping with Russia's long-standing policy to prevent "internationalization" of Chechnya. Russian officials have evinced greater interest in bringing together human rights activists with Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov in late February. Human rights advocates are torn between obligations to the Council of Europe and the prospect of lending any credibility to Kadyrov, whom most consider a criminal, at a minimum. END SUMMARY.

#### HEARINGS IN MOSCOW

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¶2. (C) The International Commission of Jurists sponsored a two-day hearing on Russia's counter-terrorism policies and human rights, one of several hearings that it and its Eminent Panel of Jurists have conducted worldwide. Chaired by former UN Human Rights Commissioner and Irish President Mary Robinson, the panel also included Hina Jilani, the UNSYG Representative for Human Rights Defenders, and Stefan Trechsel, a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia and former president of the European Commission on Human Rights. Memorial, Human Rights Watch, the Demos Center, Civic Assistance, Amnesty International and other Russian flagship human rights organizations, as well as victims of human rights abuses, testified on Russia's conduct of the conflict in the North Caucasus and law enforcement actions against alleged Islamic extremists.

¶3. (C) While there was little new in the activists' testimony about human rights abuses in the North Caucasus or in aggressive action against purported members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, or against the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society and other NGOs, GOR officials chose not to testify. Robinson and her colleagues did not get requested meetings with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Security Service, Office of the Procurator General or Ministry of Internal Affairs. They did meet with Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, Ella Pamfilova, chair of the Presidential Commission on the Development of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights, and an official at the Ministry of Justice.

¶4. (C) Robinson had appealed to Western embassy representatives during a reception in the panel's honor to encourage GOR officials to meet with her and her colleagues and made repeated references to the panel's interest in getting "both sides" during its hearings. Robinson told us that the panel had received excellent cooperation from other governments, including the U.S. Frustrated, the panel left Moscow a day early because it had no meetings. Russian NGO contacts said the panelists had complained about the GOR's lack of cooperation, and they had sharpened their remarks during a final press conference. A statement released at the

press conference said that Russia's counterterrorist policies have led to a suppression of human rights.

¶15. (C) Demos Center's Tanya Lokshina attributed the GOR's reticence to Trechsel's presence on the panel because of GOR sensitivities over the Hague Tribunal and allegations by some that war crimes had been committed in Chechnya. Lokshina thought that the GOR had needlessly hurt its reputation by refusing to testify and largely ignoring the panel, almost compelling the panel to release a critical statement.

A ROUNDTABLE IN GROZNY

¶16. (C) Conversely, the GOR is eager to host Council of Europe (COE) representatives and human rights groups for a roundtable in Grozny at the end of February. Lokshina told us she had been approached by a Presidential Administration official in December seeking her participation and promising Kadyrov would appear to hear criticism and specific instances of abuse in Chechnya. She said human rights NGOs were debating how to respond. They were caught between the involvement of the COE, which many of them consider to be one of the few potential positive influences on GOR behavior, and their reluctance to lend Kadyrov any credibility. No one was naive enough to think the roundtable would lead to any substantive improvement in the human rights situation or investigation of specific cases, Lokshina said.

¶17. (C) Human Rights Watch Country Director Allison Gill said human rights groups agreed that activists based in Chechnya should not be involved, for their own protection. Beyond that, groups were split between vehement opposition to participating and those who wanted to attempt to negotiate

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their participation. Lokshina said that groups would try to delay the roundtable to have more time to come to a consensus on a response.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The GOR has always resisted any "internationalization" of Chechnya, especially anything even remotely tied to an international tribunal. It is no surprise that Robinson and her colleagues were not well received by the GOR. Conversely, the GOR has historically been more receptive to the COE. Although the COE has criticized GOR conduct and discussions have been contentious, the GOR sees the council as at least more amenable to GOR positions. There is an additional element that factors into the GOR's different approaches to these fora: the ongoing Kremlin efforts to polish Kadyrov's image. Having Kadyrov sit down with human right activists in a COE forum would bolster Russia's claims to the international community that it takes human rights abuses seriously, while also seeking to present a kinder, gentler Kadyrov.

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